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COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

Fifteenth session

SUMMARY RECORD OF THE 291st MEETING

Held at Headquarters, New York,
on Thursday, 18 January 1996, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Ms. CORTI

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES UNDER ARTICLE 18 OF THE CONVENTION (continued)

Combined initial and second periodic report of Iceland (CEDAW/C/ICE/1-2) (continued)

1. At the invitation of the Chairperson, Mr. Þeteursson (Iceland) took a place at the Committee table.

2. Ms. ABAKA said that the Committee would welcome information on the most common causes of mortality and morbidity among women in Iceland, including migrant women. It would also be useful to know what was the incidence of breast cancer among women in Iceland and what programmes were in place to educate them about the disease. She wondered what impact Iceland's liberal abortion laws had on women's health and whether any statistics were available on abortion-related deaths. Given the negative effects of that practice on the reproductive health of women, it would be useful to know whether there were any limitations on the number of abortions women were permitted to have.

3. Ms. SHALEV welcomed the efforts that were being made to revise the legislation governing maternity leave. More information was needed, however, on the public subsidies that were provided for health services, including the supply of contraceptives, abortions, diagnostic tests for cervical and breast cancer, and hormonal treatment for menopausal and post-menopausal women. She wondered to what extent the public health system provided access to post-natal care, sex education and counselling for teenagers, as well as contraceptives for women and teenage girls. Moreover, it would be useful to know whether domestic and sexual violence was considered a public health issue and what reporting procedures were in place for health care professionals. She would also welcome information on whether women's health issues were included among the subjects of medical research in Iceland and on the availability of treatment for infertility. How widespread was the use of such therapies, how was the cost covered and were there any laws regulating such treatment? It would be helpful if the Committee could be provided with gender-disaggregated statistics on the incidence of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, occupational health hazards and mental illnesses.

4. Ms. OUEDRAOGO said that it was important to provide the Committee with a detailed description of the programmes and policies specifically geared towards rural women. Information should be provided on the average income of rural women, whether they had access to maternal health services and whether the sexual health needs of women and girls were being addressed.

5. Ms. SCHÖPP-SCHILLING agreed that the lack of statistics made it difficult to assess the situation of rural women in Iceland. It would be interesting to know, for example, how many women between the ages of 16 and 64 were classified as rural women, how many of them were homemakers, farm workers, or both. Was there any hidden or systemic discrimination against rural women? What kind of jobs were available to rural women, particularly those who were single? Were

rural women working with their spouses covered by their husband's or their own social security? Additional information was also needed on the situation of women living in towns with populations of just over 200, including their prospects for earning a living outside of the home.

6. Ms. CARTWRIGHT suggested that future periodic reports should provide more specific information under the various articles. She wished to know whether women in Iceland enjoyed the right to inherit land and other property and what were their rights upon the dissolution of their marriage.

7. Ms. BERNARD sought clarification of article 7 of the Marriage Act which provided that a man and a women could enter into marriage when reaching the age of 18. It would be useful to know whether persons below the age of 18 could enter into marriage or whether the consent of the parents was required in such cases.

8. Ms. SCHÖPP-SCHILLING asked whether the unit of taxation was the family or the individual.

9. Mr. Peteursson (Iceland) withdrew.

IMPLEMENTATION OF ARTICLE 21 OF THE CONVENTION ON THE ELIMINATION OF ALL FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN (continued)

10. Ms. ABAKA, reporting on the forty-seventh session of the Subcommission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities, said that the issues considered by the Subcommission included the new international economic order and the promotion of human rights, the role and equal participation of women in development, the implementation of the human rights of women, and communications concerning human rights.

11. A number of resolutions and decisions adopted by the Subcommission were of particular interest to the Committee. They included resolution 1995/5 on the situation of human rights in Rwanda, which, inter alia, appealed to the Government of Rwanda and the international community to provide, with the collaboration of the Organization of African Unity, all the assistance needed for the establishment of a State governed by the rule of law and for the reconstruction of the country in conformity with the decisions and the interests of the people of Rwanda; resolution 1995/14 on systematic rape and sexual slavery during periods of armed conflict, which invited the Special Rapporteur on that topic to submit a working paper to the Subcommission; and resolution 1995/20 on traditional practices affecting the health of women and children which recommended that the mandate of the Special Rapporteur on that topic should be extended for another two years. It was important for the Committee to develop a close working relationship with the Special Rapporteur. In that connection, it would be useful for the Plan of Action for the Elimination of Harmful Traditional Practices affecting the Health of Women and Children to be made available to the experts.

12. Also of interest were resolution 1995/26 on the implementation of the human rights of women and the girl child, which expressed the hope that the Committee would be integrated as soon as possible with the other human rights treaty

monitoring mechanisms and requested the Secretary-General to obtain the Committee's views on whether it would be desirable to have an advisory opinion on the value and legal effect of reservations concerning the Convention; and resolution 1995/32 on the effects on the full enjoyment of human rights of structural adjustment programmes. The latter recommended that the Commission on Human Rights should consider that question at its fifty-second session under the agenda item entitled "Question of the realization in all countries of economic, social and cultural rights contained in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The right to development was a human rights issue and the effects of structural adjustment programmes on women and vulnerable groups was therefore a legitimate preoccupation of the Committee.

13. Ms. GARCIA-PRINCE, repo ting on the expert group meeting on the development of guidelines for the integration of gender perspectives into human rights activities organized by the Centre for Human Rights, said that the meeting, which took place in Geneva from 3 to 7 July 1995, had been attended by regional experts, non-governmental organizations and United Nations agency representatives.

14. The report of the meeting contained a conceptual framework which outlined the essential elements in the development of a gender-sensitive approach in the United Nations human rights activities and suggestions on how the framework could be applied. It referred to the main problems of using gender-sensitive instruments relating to violations of women's human rights, and raised the question of how to apply gender perspectives in missions designed to investigate the human rights of women. It offered guidelines on using the language of human rights and gender perspective, which had been one of the most important issues discussed by working groups at the Meeting. The working groups had also discussed methodology, and the need to develop minimum standards for applying gender-sensitive guidelines in the area of human rights and establishing the responsibility of States and institutions for violations of women's rights.

15. The Report contained comprehensive which could be made available systemwide for use by investigators. It was the first time an effort had been made to collect all the initiatives made by treaty bodies to interpret the question of women's human rights. It was also the first time that the real meaning and implications of the term "gender sensitive" had been properly explored. The Report would be an important reference document for the members of the Committee.

The meeting rose at 4.05 p.m.